

Heart throbs made the women swoon

# IDOLS OF SILVER SCREEN

**VALENTINO, Gable, Grant, Flynn, Newman and of course The Duke . . . swashbuckling or sophisticated, macho or suave, they were the men who became the idols of the silver screen.**

And as Hollywood begins celebrations for its 100th birthday, the heart throb leading men from its earliest days back in the 1900s are being dissected, revered, admired and analysed.

Since it flickered into life, Hollywood has had screen idols who made women's hearts beat faster and who symbolised for different generations that special something that was — and is — a mix of sex, sensuousness, excitement and some special chemistry that on celluloid becomes so explosive and electric that it's irresistible.

## Ultimate fantasy

The most famous of all idols to be born in the dream factories and illusion chambers that are Hollywood was Rudolf Valentino. Tall, dark and handsome, the Italian-born Valentino was the first ever true movie heart throb to translate his smouldering gaze and breathy sensuality into \$1 million per year more than 60 years ago.

As the sheik, Valentino fulfilled the ultimate

**● RUDOLF Valentino, Clark Gable and Clint Eastwood — they are just some of Hollywood's leading men who have been fluttering hearts since Tinseltown gave birth to the movies.**

**● What goes into the make-up of a male heart throb? In the second part of our series on Hollywood JENNY CULLEN charts the success of the men who reached superstar status.**

sexual fantasy of that time — handsome, passionate, exciting, he swept his heroine off her feet and took her back to his romantic lair in the Arabian desert.

While Valentino symbolised the ultimate in sensuality and sexual excitement, it seems highly likely that the screen idol was homosexual or even impotent. He was married twice but each remained uncommuted and in both cases the women were reputedly lesbians.

He died of peritonitis in 1926 at the age of 31, after which 200 women claimed him to be the father of their children, two Japanese fans jumped into a volcano unable to live without him and an American woman held his photograph to her breast while shooting herself.

His tomb at the Holly-

wood cemetery to this day remains stocked with fresh flowers by unknown admirers and women clad all in black and heavily veiled still visit the tomb and sob their grief.

Hollywood tried to create Valentino's magic with his brother Alberto and poor Alberto had more than seven nose operations to try and look like Rudolf — but to no avail. Alberto's career never took off.

Silent stars John Gilbert and Douglas Fairbanks Snr were the next screen idols to come out of Hollywood.

## Debonair lover

Gilbert was the man with the perfect profile who played Garbo's lover in countless films, while Fairbanks was the first of the swashbuckling heroes who not only swung from the masts of pirate ships and won sword fights against wicked medieval princes but did his own stunts and tried to live up to his image as the carefree athletic swashbuckler with devil-may-care charm.

Gilbert was a matinee idol and beloved by his fans worldwide but when talkies were invented his career died. Gilbert sadly had a high, squeaky voice that did not match his image as the passionate debonair lover and from 1930, after a few disastrous movies in

which he spoke, he disappeared.

Fairbanks, with his deep voice and English drama training, managed not only to survive talking pictures — they began in 1927 with the launch of Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer* — but ensured himself a permanent place in the Hollywood portals of fame by marrying movie's sweetheart Mary Pickford and setting up their mansion Pickfair, which entertained British, Spanish, Greek and

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Egyptian royalty as well as presidents, dictators and blue bloods earning the pair the nickname of King and Queen of Hollywood.

Westerns with simple good guy-bad guy stories and lots of action and shooting were the staple fare of Hollywood's early years, with Gene Autry,

Roy Rogers, Tom Mix and William S. Hart becoming firm favorites at the movies.

But it took a man called Marion Morrison, with an unlikely, almost feminine, walk to take over the Western crown and become a heart-throb for all seasons. John Wayne, called The Duke, dominated Hollywood Westerns from the '20s until his death in the late 1970s.

He was the ultimate Western hero — tough, strong, adept with a gun and a horse — but the toughness hid a heart of gold and The Duke always got the girl.

Wayne's magic persists. In a recent poll in the US held by People magazine as part of Hollywood's celebrations, readers were asked if modern-day macho hero Sylvester Stallone could lick John Wayne. There was a resounding vote in Wayne's favour.

More than 70 per cent believed the legendary Wayne could not only whip Rocky-Rambo in a game of fisticuffs but that he'd make mincemeat out of the Italian stallion.

# Bare-chested Gable started revolution

AS John Wayne dominated westerns, Clark Gable, from the thirties until his death in the late 1950s, was the heroic macho male that women adored.

Gable caused a revolution when he took off his shirt to reveal no singlet. Every man wanted to be Gable and every woman wanted Gable for their man.

Gable himself took all the adulation in his stride. "I can't emote worth a damn," he said. Darryl Zanuck refused to sign him, saying: "With those big ears he looks like an ape." And he wore dentures that were rumoured to have come out in a love scene with Lana Turner when the gum she was chewing attached itself to his teeth.

He was unable to do a love scene in *Gone With The Wind* until Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara was persuaded Gable had managed to do something

about his breath and the dentures which caused that breath.

No Hollywood heart throb list is complete without mentioning Australia's dashing, debonair, womanising charmer Errol Flynn, who arrived in Hollywood in the early 1940s, shared a bungalow with David Niven and set the town on fire.

As Captain Blood he became a number one star and he followed it up with swashbuckling role after swashbuckling role.

## Tradition

Flynn's exploits with women on and off the screen were notorious and despite his drinking and partying he was ever-charming and beloved by women who knew him.

Flynn was the first Australian heart throb in Hollywood, setting a tradition that

remains today with stars from Peter Finch to Mel Gibson to Bryan Brown to Paul Hogan following in his footsteps.

But no movie hero, past or present, had Flynn's ability with women — hence the phrase "in Like Flynn", coined in praise of Flynn's real-life exploits and conquests.

If Flynn was a swashbuckler, Cary Grant was the ultimate sophisticate, debonair, charming, suave and irresistible.

He started off in England as Archie Leach, got his first job in a circus as a stilt walker and was 'discovered' by Mae West for her movie *No Man Of Her Own*. He went on to be Hollywood's favourite leading man for three decades until he retired just before 1970 saying the birth of his daughter Jennifer was his favourite production

and his films were over.

Heart throbs from Marlon Brando, who set the town on fire in the 1950s with his under-shirt and jeans in *On The Waterfront*, to James Dean to Humphrey Bogart became part of our lives through the magic of Hollywood.

## Honesty

Fred Astaire gave us elegance, grace and dancing the like of which we have never seen again. Bogart gave us menace mixed with sex appeal. Jimmy Stewart gave us the average guy next door who had ideals, dreams and honesty. Gary Cooper gave us masculinity matched with strength and guts, Jimmy Cagney gave us cocky, abrasive, charm and Leslie Howard gave us romance and sensitivity.

Modern Hollywood has its own brand of heart throb but perhaps Paul Newman and Robert Redford are the last of the truly traditional silver screen giants.

Today there are still heart throbs but the films are no longer as romantic and the sensuality no longer quite sizzles the way it did.

Mel Gibson makes women go weak at the knees with his rugged good looks and blue eyes matched with that special chemistry they still call 'It'.

Harrison Ford is a worthy successor in the swashbuckling style to Errol Flynn and Clint Eastwood is the new western hero taking over from John Wayne.

But there are no real successors to Grant, Gable, Howard, Cooper, Cagney, Flynn and Stewart. As they say in Hollywood, they just don't make 'em like that any more.



**HOLLYWOOD**  
The first 100 years



Valentino as the sheik and (from top) Flynn, Gable and Newman . . . leading men from the early days to the present are being dissected and analysed.

Tomorrow: Female sirens of moviedom